Unexpected fame: Conservation approaches to the preparatory object. Proceedings from the International Conference of the Icon Book & Paper Group, Oxford 1–2 October 2018

https://icon.org.uk/unexpected-fame-conservation-approaches-to-the-preparatory-object

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To cite this article: Sue Hourigan, 'Christ in Majesty: John Piper's stained glass window design for St. John's Hospital, Lichfield' in *Unexpected fame: Conservation approaches to the preparatory object. Proceedings from the International Conference of the Icon Book & Paper Group, Oxford 1–2 October 2018* (London, The Institute of Conservation: 2020). https://icon.org.uk/unexpected-fame-conservation-approaches-to-the-preparatory-object (accessed date).

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Abstract
John Piper's reputation was made during World War II through his paintings of the destruction found in bombed out British cities such as Coventry and Bath. After the war he continued to work as an artist, producing work in a variety of media, but he is most well-known for his stained glass window designs, particularly Coventry Cathedral. In 2012 the Friends of Dorchester Abbey in Oxford curated an exhibition entitled *John Piper and the Church* in celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The centrepiece for the exhibition was Piper's stained glass window design *Christ in Majesty*, a cartoon measuring 3x4m, which was to be hung from the ceiling of the Abbey. Unexpectedly, fame had focused on a design which was created as a working drawing for a religious building. This paper is about the challenge of stabilising the cartoon for exhibition and reversing the self-adhesive tape and film used in its construction, whilst at the same time endeavouring to retain the elements which were integral to the design.

Keywords
John Piper; stained glass; cartoon; pressure-sensitive tape

John Egerton Christmas Piper was born in Epsom, Surrey in 1903. He spent his early childhood visiting the Tate Gallery and exploring rural Epsom on his bike, drawing and painting old churches and monuments. Piper occasionally accompanied his father on trips to Europe, which often included a visit to the churches in Chartres, where he studied the rich colouring of the stained glass windows. These visits had an enormous effect on Piper, and would turn out to be a significant and continuous influence on his work.

At the age of 15 Piper attended Epsom College; he did not enjoy his time there and left after three years. He published a book of poetry but his real ambition was to study art. Nonetheless, his father insisted he join the family law firm and for three years Piper worked alongside his father as an articled clerk. However, he never qualified, eventually failing his degree. Sadly, his father had died the previous year, and this allowed Piper's mother to generously pay for him to go to Richmond School of Art, followed by the Royal College of Art in 1928. Once again Piper found the regime of studying could be dull and he left a year later,[1] though this did not prevent him from earning a reputation as a leading artist of the avant garde set by 1939. As an artist Piper produced work in a variety of media: collaged landscapes, watercolours and screen prints. He also explored abstract painting, describing the time as 'an admirable and useful and probably for me necessary discipline in order simply to learn what happens when you put a simple colour against another simple colour'.[2]

Piper became even more popular as an official war artist during the period 1940–44 when he was invited by the War Artist Advisory Committee to record damaged churches for a fee of 50 guineas. He arrived in Coventry the morning after the Coventry Blitz when the fires were still raging. He completed two oil paintings of the Cathedral, and 17 years later he was commissioned to design the baptistry window for St Michael's Cathedral. This design, for which he is perhaps most famous, comprises 195 individual lights (sections). Each was painted to scale on the floor of his studio at Fawley Bottom in Oxfordshire.[3] The design shows Piper's continuing fascination with colour.

In 2011, I was commissioned by Eton College to stabilise Piper's designs for the stained glass windows of their fifteenth-century chapel. During this project I was invited to comment on the stability of Piper's cartoon for *Christ in Majesty*, designed in 1983 for the east window for St John's Hospital, Lichfield.

This cartoon was to be the centrepiece for an exhibition, *John Piper and the Church,* in celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 at Dorchester Abbey.[4] The cartoon was to be suspended with monofilament from the beams of the Abbey 17 metres from the ground. It depicts Christ seated on a throne with winged figures below his outstretched arms, with the symbols of the four evangelists in the corners: angel (Matthew), lion (Mark), bull (Luke) and eagle (John).

Sebastian Piper, John Piper's fourth and last child, brought the cartoon to Eton College and unrolled the massive creation on a large oak table. The full intensity of Piper's use of colour which had been influenced by the stained glass windows in Chartres was revealed,

1 Frances Spalding, 'That's Painting!' in *John Piper Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25.

2 Inexpensive Progress, 'John Piper - South Bank Show, 1983,' YouTube video, 7:56, 27 September 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiaiM-irNJHc.

3 Goldmark Gallery, 'John Piper "An Empty Stage' " feature film, YouTube video 38:24, 12 August 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jPEW0D2GJJo.

4 David Booys, 'John Piper and the Church - Dorchester Abbey,' YouTube video, 3:34, 24 April 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnL-taoRxUlw.

Fig. 1 Tube attached to cartoon with black plastic film. © The Piper Estate

and so was the condition. The cartoon measures 3 x 4 m and has five panels of paper joined together on the recto with black-painted masking tape, supported on the verso with transparent self-adhesive plastic film. A narrow tube had been attached to the cartoon at the top with black plastic film (Fig. 1). The tube supported the cartoon while it was on exhibition and was also used to roll up the cartoon for storage. The narrowness of the tube had caused severe creasing and cupping across the cartoon, which in turn resulted in abrasion to some pigments (Figs. 2 and 3). Black plastic film had also been used to attach a wooden baton to the bottom of the cartoon. The masking tape on the recto was losing its tack and peeling off the cartoon, no longer fulfilling its function (Fig. 4). There was a large tear at the bottom of Christ's feet, and other tears had been repaired with brown gummed tape overlaid with transparent plastic film. After 28 years the plastic film had become brittle and had started to peel away from the cartoon. The cartoon was in no condition to be suspended from the Abbey beams.

The first aim of the treatment, commissioned by Piper's son, was to remove the plastic film from the recto and verso of the cartoon. For this to be accomplished the panels needed joining with overlapping paper straps under the painted masking tape, which would be removed and re-adhered after the joins had been supported. The tube and baton would also be replaced with a hanging system that would not endanger the cartoon. And thus the painstaking task of reversing the self-adhesive film and tape was begun.

The cartoon was rolled onto a 150mm acid free tube which facilitated turning and moving the cartoon during treatment. The wooden baton was cut from the bottom of the cartoon

Fig. 2 Creasing caused by the narrow tube. © The Piper Estate

Fig. 3 Pigment abrasion. © The Piper Estate

Fig. 4 Black-painted masking tape joining panels. © The Piper Estate

before the black plastic film was removed. A Quick 860DA hot air pencil rework station obtained from Kaisertech (Fig. 5) and a crepe eraser were used to remove the pressure-sensitive tapes, which eliminated the use of solvents (Fig. 6). The hot air pencil is fast heating with a temperature range from 100°C to 450°C, an adjustable air flow and automatic start when the handle is picked up.

The plastic film was removed relatively easily but the same could not be said of the adhesive residue that remained, which smeared and spread with the crepe eraser. However, a dusting of dry wheat starch powder reduced the tack of the adhesive and made it easier to remove. The cartoon was then turned over to permit removal of the transparent plastic film from the bottom edge of the verso. Three layers of plastic film were found along the bottom edge of the verso of the cartoon. This quantity of self-adhesive material on one object is rare and also overwhelming. There were many moments when confidence in the treatment plan gave way to huge doubts, but the journey had begun and there was no turning back, and the April deadline for the cartoon to be installed in the Abbey was approaching quickly.

Fig. 5 Masking tape removal with hot air pencil. © The Piper Estate

Fig. 6 Adhesive removal with crepe eraser. © The Piper Estate

Fig. 7 Book cloth sleeve reinforcement. © The Piper Estate

Once all the plastic film was removed from the lower edge, the cartoon was turned to the recto again for the removal of the painted masking tape. The original plan was to preserve and reuse the masking tape, as it was integral to the design and indicative of Piper's resourcefulness. To this end, the tape was rolled round a tube for support whilst being removed. Unfortunately it was soon apparent the tape could not be salvaged and reapplied; the black paint had begun to flake and would not stand up to removal and reapplication. However, a solution to replace this key component was proposed and readily accepted, and the removal proceeded. As a length of masking tape was released, the joins were supported with paper straps. Because the treatment proposal included removing the plastic film from the verso of the cartoon, the panels needed to be joined in such a way they would not fail when the cartoon was suspended. Black *Matsuo kozo* paper straps were overlapped and adhered over the joins with EVA (ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer) as there was a very real danger wheat starch paste would not endure the rigours of the exhibition and any future exhibitions. The cartoon was covered with a layer of Bondina (non-woven polyester) and rolled round the 150mm acid free tube as the procedure advanced to the top of the cartoon. The plastic film and the tube were likewise removed from the top edge of the cartoon mechanically.

A lightweight bookcloth was attached on the recto top edge, folded over and adhered to the verso to form a sleeve, allowing the original wooden baton to pass through to keep the cartoon rigid while it was suspended. Five new lengths of acid-free 120 gsm Fabriano Accademia paper were painted with acrylic paint to replace the masking tape; the ends were adhered under the bookcloth, which was reinforced as a precaution with more Fabriano paper painted black (Fig. 7). The five lengths of Fabriano paper were adhered over the *Matsuo kozo* paper straps until finally reaching the bottom, where a second bookcloth sleeve was attached to hold a baton to keep the bottom edge of the cartoon under tension during the exhibition. The tears were aligned and adhered from the recto before paper straps were adhered to the verso using the same overlapping technique used to support the joins. A storage bag was made from padded calico to protect the cartoon during transit from the studio to the abbey and also to protect the cartoon when not on loan. The cartoon remained rolled round the tube until it was installed in the exhibition which resulted in reducing the cupping caused by the original tube. Surprisingly, once suspended from the abbey beams the cartoon appeared

almost flat to the visitors below.

The treatment to stabilise the cartoon and make it safe to hang in the Abbey took 150 hours. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to remove the transparent plastic film from the verso because the estimated time turned out to be unrealistic as a result of this unique challenge (Fig. 8).

This cartoon was Piper's last major undertaking of a career stretching over six decades. He was very prolific and committed to his art right up until his death in 1992. His legacy is extensive, and his popularity continues which has resulted in his designs for stained glass windows becoming collectable pieces in their own right. His working methods have had an impact on the stability of his work which continues to provide challenging and exciting preservation projects.

Fig. 8 The cartoon in Dorcester Abbey. © The Piper Estate

Biography
Sue Hourigan qualified as a professional paper conservator in 1988. She has accrued thirty years' experience as a professional paper conservator working for local authority record offices and as a freelance conservator. She has worked on single items and large collections, dealing with everything from simple repairs to complex paper conservation treatments, and specialising in herbarium specimens, stained glass window designs, parchment documents, medieval wax seals, Victorian bibles, and fine bindings.

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Crepe Eraser product code 682-2030
Bondina non-woven polyester 30gsm, product code 492-3228
EVA neutral pH adhesive, product code 601-1032
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